



Alcimedès

A recent report published by the Government's Science and Technology Committee has suggested that drinkers should be alcohol-free for at least two days per week.¹ This report concedes that much of the current guidance on safe drinking levels is confusing and contradictory, with many drinkers being unaware of suggested limits.

The idea of "safe drinking" was first promoted by the Government in 1981, with the "safe limits" of 21 and 14 units per week for men and women, respectively, being drafted in 1987. These recommendations were endorsed by several Medical Royal Colleges at the time. The Department of Health has welcomed this latest report, which it will study before considering whether to re-draft current drinking guidelines.

Alcimedès hopes that the hardened drinkers out there don't get confused between "Alcohol-free" and "Free alcohol."

Sir Peter North's report² into drink and drug driving was published in June 2010, with the Government's response arriving approximately nine months later. Of the 51 recommendations contained within Sir Peter's publication, 28 related to drink driving and 23 to drug driving. Several of the recommendations within the drug drive section discussed the notion of establishing the blood levels at which controlled drugs cause impairment. If such levels could not be established, Sir Peter suggested that a zero-tolerance approach to controlled drugs within the blood should be considered, although this would require new legislation.

In January 2012, the Government went some way to addressing these issues by announcing that an expert panel will be convened to consider the possibility of establishing impairment levels for controlled drugs.³ It is hoped that the panel will produce their findings in the coming months, although the finer details of this group have yet to be revealed.

Lie detectors make interesting viewing for some daytime television programmes, though their accuracy remains highly questionable. Nevertheless, Hertfordshire police have recently announced that polygraphs have been used, with the suspects' consents, during the investigation of 25 paedophile cases.⁴ Although the evidence is not admissible in Court, this pilot study has suggested that their use could reduce the amount of time and money currently being spent on the actual investigation. A further 12-month study is being proposed to start in April 2012 and is

presumably being eyed carefully by many authorities, including the Home Office, ACPO and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The debate on "the way forward" in the fight against illicit drugs has been simmering for decades, with heated arguments raging as to whether they should be decriminalised, legalised, or something in-between. The Home Office Select Committee has launched an inquiry⁵ into drugs policy and has heard from a diverse range of experts including Sir Richard Branson and the former President of Switzerland, Ruth Dreifuss (both of whom are commissioners on the Global Commission on Drugs Policy) and the UK Drug Policy Commission.

This inquiry follows on from a damning report in June 2011 by the Global Commission on Drugs Policy,⁶ which concluded that the international war on drugs had failed. It is therefore of particular interest, that a recent study in *The Lancet* calculated that there were approximately 200 million users of illicit drugs throughout the world.⁷ By using data from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the authors surmised that there were between 149 and 271 million people using illegal drugs worldwide. Cannabis was the most frequently used, with between 125 and 203 million users across the globe. The often covert nature of drug use makes establishing these figures more accurately an enormous challenge, but such ball-park figures highlight the extent of this worldwide problem. Indeed, the authors also emphasise that intelligent drug policies cannot be established until more accurate data is available.

References

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